CHAPTER 5

PREVIOUS INVESTIGATIONS

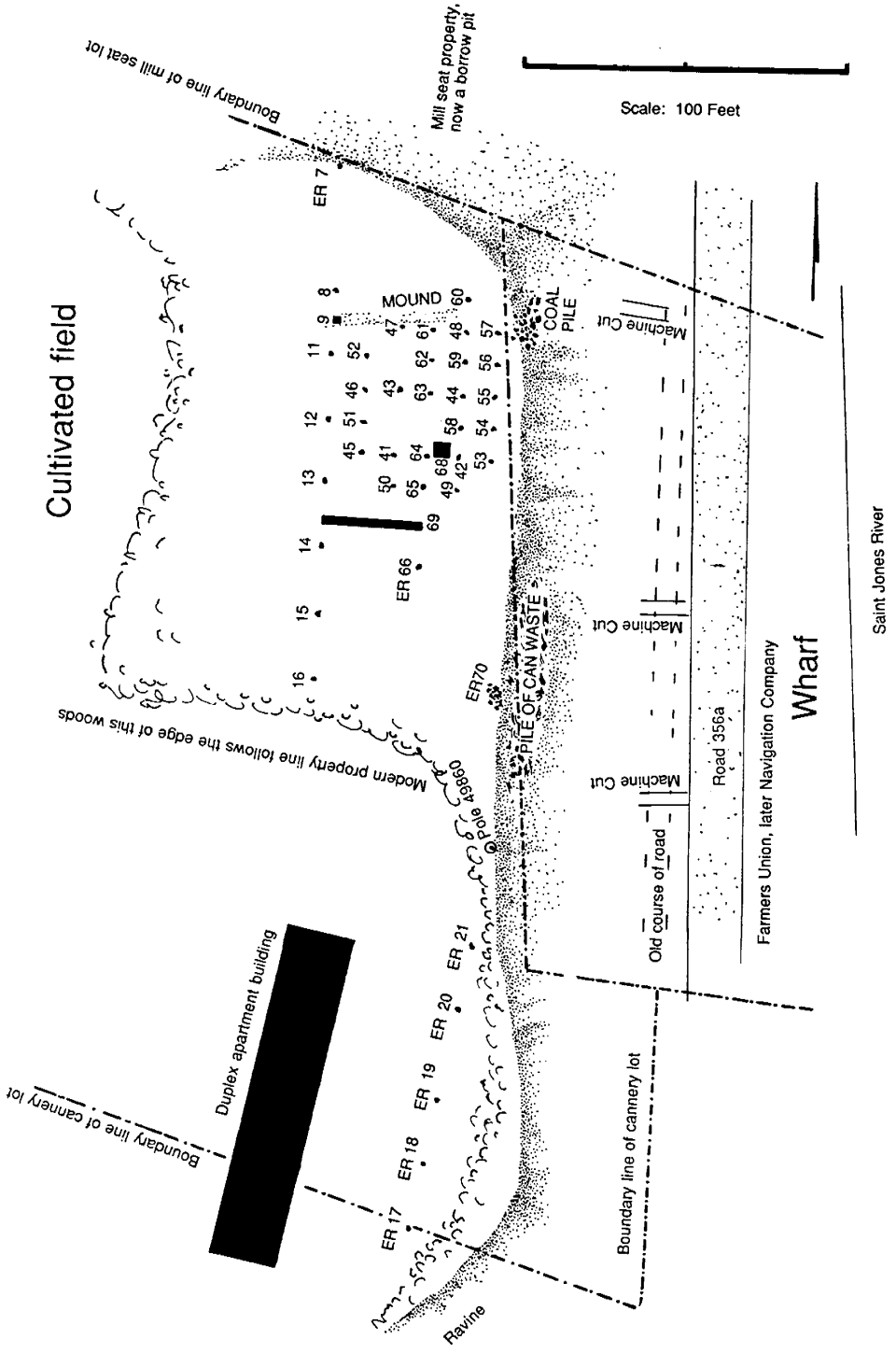
INITIAL TESTING AT THE CANNERY SITE was reported in a previous publication (Heite and Heite 1989). Since the present project continues the excavation register of the first test, a summary is in order. A standard numbering system was used, in which a single designator identifies the stratum and the artifacts from it. Appendix 1 of the current report contains a continuation of the numerical register, reflecting the 1989 work, with a description of each unit and the artifacts found in it. Each whole number denotes an excavated unit and the unstratified material from it. Buried levels are identified by a letter suffix. The Island Field Site accession number for the material is 88-228, followed by the ER number.

The site of the Collins, Geddes and Company cannery lay on the bluff overlooking the Saint Jones River. The wooded part of the cannery lot shows no evidence of recent cultivation. There are no buildings on the site, but local residents remember remnants of the old structure along the top of the ridge. The ground is littered with brick fragments, coal, and charcoal.

Since the cannery site deed refers to a 25-foot setback from the road along the river, it was necessary to reconstruct the nineteenth-century topography in order to locate the cannery lot. All the property deeds from the middle of the nineteenth century forward refer to a line 25 feet west of the road. In order to locate the original road a Gradall machine was used to dig three cuts into the flat ground between the present road and the toe of the slope. The machine revealed a beach-like profile, with deep sand to a depth of two feet and more in all three cuts. In the southernmost cut, adjacent to the toe of the slope, the machine cut through twenty inches of old road metalling that had survived against the toe of the hill. The top layer was black oily sand, overlying a layer of rust. Below a layer of coal clinker was a thick layer of oyster shell fragments resting on brown sand. This succession of metalling reflects the succeeding practices in road maintenance up to the beginning of the twentieth century. Until just after World War II, the wharf buildings occupied the present Road 356a right-of-way, forcing the road closer to the hill (FIGURE 6). When this road alignment is accepted, cannery lot deed descriptions fit the topography.

Figure 6

Map of the cannery site and its environs, showing Phase II tests



The northerly part of the cannery lot was part of the land Daniel Mifflin bought from Hutchinson in 1783 , and became part of the Samuel Mifflin share of the estate of Nathaniel Hunn. Isaac Draper lived on a different part of this tract, but there is no documentary indication of a building here before the cannery. A firm then styled "Brown, Geddes and Company" bought about two and a half acres from the Dyer family in 1869 and began construction on the cannery.

Topography

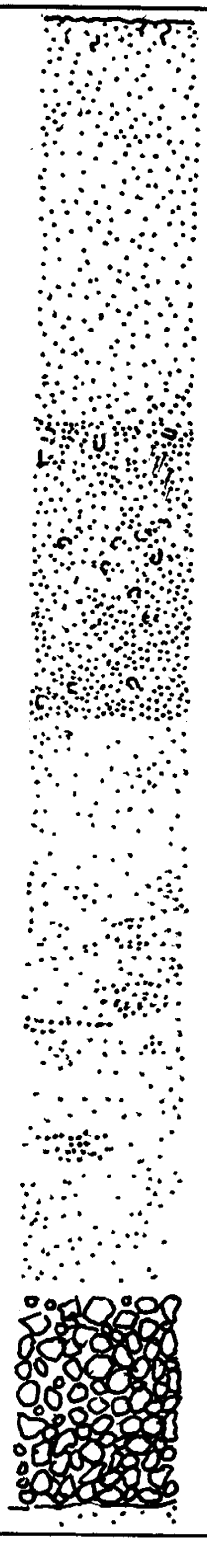
On the north, the edge of the canning plant site is marked by a deep borrow pit that almost completely occupies the portion of the mill seat tract where the 1793 Hunn bloomery forge had stood. The plant site has an artificially flattened appearance, both on the topographic map and on the ground. There is a small ridge running across its north end that appears to be manmade. Otherwise, no above-ground structures survive from the cannery.

There are, however, many surface indications of the cannery location. A large mass of sheet metal waste has been dumped over the edge of the bluff, indicating that can manufacture was carried out nearby. Piles of broken brick attest to salvage operations after the cannery was destroyed.

Phase I and Phase II archæological investigations

The first step in the archæological elucidation of the cannery site was a line of shovel test pits, numbered 7-9 and 11-16, roughly along the reputed eastern boundary of the cannery lot as interpreted in the current deed record. Surface indications pointed to the cannery lying east of this line, since building debris and can-making waste was concentrated along the crest of the hill.

The first test, ER 7, was placed at the north end of the cannery lot, on the edge of the hole that now occupies the mill seat property. The topsoil was a rich, brown sandy color and texture typical of this locality. A yellow sandy subsoil was encountered at 12" and was opened to a depth of 16" when it was apparent that all cultural layers had been penetrated. Many of the other test pits in this area would exhibit a similar profile, but with considerable variation in the depth of the overlying brown soils. Because of obstacles, ER 8 was placed on the line at 40 feet from the beginning point. A square unit, ER 9, three feet on a side, was sited on a linear mound that appears to be a manmade feature, 50 feet from the beginning point. Aside from a large amount of coal and clinker, the unit was indistinguishable from other parts of the site. No evidence of buried features was uncovered.



Profile of ER 68

ER 68 Brown loamy sand topsoil

----------13 inches below surface

ER 68a Trashy layer of brown loamy sand

----------22 inches below surface

ER 68b Compacted yellow cloddy layer
with brick and ash

----------40 inches below surface

ER 68 c Layer of brick bats, mortar,
coal ash, and building debris with
very little soil

----------47 inches below surface

Figure 7

Beginning with unit 11, the rest of the tests on the traverse were placed at intervals of twenty feet, to unit 16, at 160 feet from the beginning point. This last unit uncovered robbed-out brickwork consisting of small fragments of brick and a quantity of loose mortar. Although the line crossed the entire wooded area, its length is still 56 feet short of the final total length of the cannery building. However it was situated, the cannery must have covered much of the duplex apartment lot as well as the woodland.

After consultation, it was decided that more tests were necessary to delineate the extent of the cannery remains in the wooded area to be disturbed by the project. Additional test pitting was chosen as the method of finding the activity areas, to be supplemented by some larger test pits situated in areas where features might be found. The pits, numbered 41-67, were placed first on a grid of twenty feet, which was then infilled at ten-foot intervals in areas that seemed to be closer to the center of the site. Extreme variations in topsoil depth and content gave evidence that the site contained a complex array of features.

Plate 30
Canmaking waste in the bank, as first uncovered

Eventually it was possible to draw an inverted topographic map of the site's subsurface contours by plotting the depths of the brown topsoil in all the test pits . This inverted topographic map indicated the presence of a large hole, such as a cellar, but the maximum depth of brown topsoil was three feet at only one point near the center. It was apparent that yellow fill dirt had been mistakenly identified as subsoil, but the slumping of fill had produced a telltale depression. After the plot was made, a test square, ER 68, five feet square, was sunk into the apparent middle.

Sure enough, the hole proved to be a cellar, four feet deep, with a compact fill of yellow soil that had been indistinguishable from subsoil in the limited viewing area of a shovel test pit. Only a quarter of the unit was opened to the full depth, where a layer of robbed brick rubble was found lying on the earthen floor together with piles of coal ash that had burned *in situ.*

Another test, ER 69, consisted of a trench two feet wide and thirty feet long, cutting generally across the line of the probable factory location. Since the building was largely of wood, substantial foundations should be absent. Subsoil features included a set of plow scars and one postmold in a post hole. The subsoil on the eastern half of the trench was slightly deeper and slightly harder than on the western part, and a clear line of demarcation was visible, even though there was only a half-inch difference in elevation on either side of the line. This harder subsoil was interpreted as a possible dirt floor.

Over the edge of the bluff, cannery remains were more abundant. Workmen in the cannery tin shop had apparently thrown their scrap over the hill, onto the Farmers Union lot. None was found on the steep bluff area owned by the canning company, where an overhead ramp was supposed to have been located.

The cannery waste has been explored for many years by Dr. Bryan, who turned over his collection to the authors for inclusion in this report. Examination of Bryan's collection and a cursory collection made during the first survey under this project indicated that there was much more to be learned about industrial-grade tinworking from the waste on the site. Accordingly, after consultation, the ER 22 canmaking waste collection was expanded to bring in a more comprehensive collection of the waste.

A pile of robbed brick, ER 70, was located on the brow of the hill. Since none of the fragments were complete, this deposit probably represents a brick salvager's waste pile, as did the bricks found in the cellar hole. Measurable sides of all bricks were tabulated in hopes that different building phases might be distinguished.